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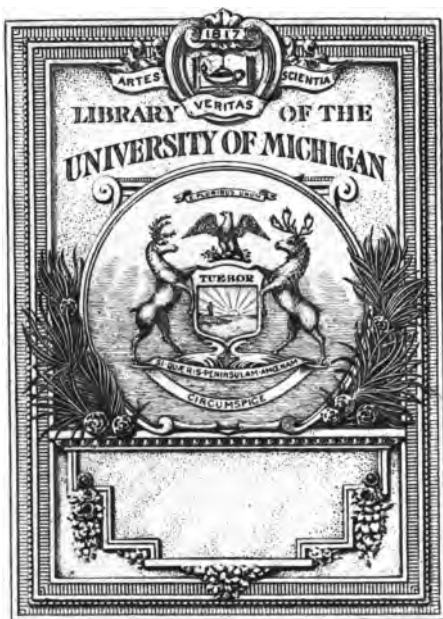
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A
LETTER TO A FRIEND
ON
SWEDENBORGIANISM.

BOSTON!

PUBLISHED BY OTIS CLAPP.

S. COLMAN, NEW YORK; H. F. FAIRBANK, PHILADELPHIA;
A. PEABODY, CINCINNATI; AND W. NEWBERY, LONDON.

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LETTER.

MY DEAR SIR,

You will, no doubt, wonder what all this is about; and had I space to speak much of myself, I should feel tempted to enter into a somewhat lengthy apology for what I am now doing. As it is, however, I shall content myself by simply saying, that I am acting under a dictate of conscience; trusting that your respect for such dictates will ever guard a person, so acting, from the risk of offending you.

My desire is, again to invite your attention to the Theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

I am well aware that the world thinks this man mad, and his writings a tissue of absurdities; and that nothing but the highest degree of fanatical enthusiasm could enable his followers to believe in them. You have, however, known me now a very long time; and though I by no means wish to lay claim to more rationality than falls to the average lot of human beings, still I think I may say, that there is nothing flighty or enthusiastic in the general cast of my temperament; and I can assure you also, on the word of a christian, that the same may be said of the followers of Swedenborg as a body. Indeed I may with truth add, that some of the clearest and calmest thinkers of my acquaintance, are of this community.

This circumstance has forced itself upon the attention of many, who feel a sort of wonder, that a body of men, believing such a set of doctrines, can yet, in the ordinary relations of life, conduct themselves so very like other respectable members of society; and very clever things, I have no doubt, have been said to account for the curious fact, that men, otherwise sane, should keep a corner of their minds, as it were, to be tenanted by a little bit of

madness, and should keep it so orderly withal and quiet, as to manifest itself only by a string of theological propositions.

However clever may have been the theories by which men have endeavored to account for it, I do most sincerely believe, that there is a shorter and easier mode of explaining the difficulty.

Suppose, for instance, that the world should be under a mistake, as to the madness of these opinions; suppose that future ages should find them a body of high and holy truth instead; this would do just as well, and save us the trouble of theorizing.

There is a common anecdote of Charles the First, who, it is said, had about his court a certain set of philosophers, to whom you never could propose a difficulty, but instantly a theory was broached to explain it; in fact they could explain everything. The king one day proposed to them the following question: — How is it, said he, that if I take a vessel of water weighing so much, water and all, and then take a fish, which I put into this water, — how is it, that while the fish is swimming in the water, the whole weighs no more than it did before the fish was put into it. The philosophers fell instantly to work, and made most edifying and beautiful theories to explain the difficulty. At last a simple man, who had no pretensions in the philosophical way whatever, stepped forward, and ventured to doubt the fact of the vessel's weighing no more with the fish in it than it did without. The philosophers frowned of course upon such ignorant presumption, but could not very well evade his request that the experiment might be tried; which was done accordingly, and lo! — and behold! it was found, that the vessel did weigh just as much more with the fish in it as the weight of the fish itself.

Now this, I humbly conceive, is just a parallel case. The world calls our doctrines madness, and then wonders that we can be sane who hold them. Would to heaven, it would but take the pains to try, by examination, whether they are so or not, before it puzzles itself with a difficulty of its own creation; if it would only have the kindness to weigh our Fish.

But this we do not expect. For on most subjects of importance, the majority of men have already in their minds, a certain set of notions. How many of these have

a place there by virtue of their truth and reason, and how many on the authority of education and custom merely, are questions, not perhaps often considered as strictly as they ought to be; but certain it is, they have them, and the short and easy method of dealing with any new thing, is simply to bring these notions to bear upon it, to view it by their light, and their light only; if it agree with these previous notions, well and good, it is received as a truth; if it disagree, it is rejected, and that, with a violence and hostility proportioned to the extent of such disagreement.

Now it so happens, that in the pages of the books I recommend, there are to be found, no scanty supply of direct assertions, couched in the most explicit terms, and put forth, with a certain mild temerity, right in the teeth, as it were, of these notions of men in general, and this on a great variety of subjects. Their rejection, and condemnation might therefore have been anticipated. All men however have not rejected them. I would therefore wish to say a word or two on the case of those who receive them.

For it may well be asked, how comes it, that men with minds moulded into the same cast of thought, and receiving the form and pressure of this same nineteenth century of ours, in common with others, should accept that as the highest truth, which to mankind in general, appears the grossest absurdity? Can they be blind, it may be added, to the things in these books which are so objectionable to every one else? I reply, most certainly not.

They see them, but they do not, like the world, see them only; they see much more. They see, lying behind, a system which explains, supports and accounts for these things. They find this system opening up vast and hitherto hidden relations between all the highest objects of human thought, the Creator, his written Word, the visible universe, and the mind of man; and by such means capable of combining the scattered and conflicting fragments of human knowledge, upon all possible subjects, into one apprehensible, harmonious, and stupendous whole, whose centre is God. They are awed no less than affected by the sanctity of its tendencies, in the work of human regeneration, its nicely discriminative rejection of all evil, its exaltation of every good; and they find, in their daily experience, the continual proofs of its truth, arising so legitimately from the very nature of things, that, when in

contrast, they review the notions which they formerly held in common with the world on similar subjects, it is to regard *these* as visionary, vain notions, which accordingly vanish from their minds, like the thin figures of a phantasmagoria when one admits upon them the light of day.

I know that these are only assertions; but when I can honestly add to them this also, that a candid examination will prove their truth, surely I am making assertions which deserve some attention.

Nor am I stating any new and unheard of case, when I say, that facts positively true, may appear absurd, yea madness, when viewed apart, and by those who are entirely ignorant of the system which explains and accounts for them. For look only to Astronomy, and let us suppose that mankind in general had only the same degree of knowledge of its system as they have of Swedenborg's — and heaven knows that would be just about none at all — let us suppose them to know as much about it as our simple peasantry do at this day, — what would such people think? When against their firm belief, that they had seen the sun rise at one side of the sky, move across the heavens, and set on the other, and this every day of their lives, and that all men had witnessed the same fact, since there were any to witness it; what would they think, if we were to produce to them a book, and read out of it the assertion, that the sun stood stock still? Further, if against their notion that the huge earth, with all its ponderous mountains, was the most fixed and steadfast thing imaginable, you were to read the assertion, that the earth was really whisking through space one hundred and twenty times faster than a cannon shot. Let this book also tell them that there were men on the other side of the world walking with their feet towards us, and their heads pointing downwards; that the steeples of their churches and masts of their ships also pointed downwards; that the surfaces of their seas and rivers faced downwards, and that they moved in their boats head downwards upon them like flies on a ceiling; that the bright moon was made of dirt, like our ground, and that probably there were men and women in it; — I only ask what would such people think of a book containing such things? And if you were to say to them, I know these things appear strange, but then it is because you do not understand the system which accounts for them, — would

they not say, away with a system which is to persuade us out of our senses.

I think I need not press this matter farther, but consider it therefore a proved case, that the facts which are connected with a particular set of opinions, may, as we thus see, appear absurd, when viewed by those unacquainted with their true nature, and looking at them from contrary notions; which facts and opinions, upon a closer examination and better acquaintance with them, shall nevertheless be found to possess the power of vindicating their own reasonableness and throwing off the charge of absurdity, to fix it for ever upon the very notions, by which they were at first opposed.

And now the question arises, can the Doctrines of Swedenborg do this?

We who have tried the experiment of their examination, some of us for the greater part of our lives, take our stand upon the knowledge thus attained, and put in our solemn testimony, that they can.

The world not having tried the experiment, and taking its stand on its sheer ignorance, as roundly asserts that they cannot. I only ask which of the two is the competent witness?

And now I would most seriously and earnestly observe, that if there be the remotest chance for thinking it barely possible that these doctrines may be true, then, would I could make it known to every one entertaining such a thought, that there is that in them which should set every sincere man to the study of their contents, from one end of christendom to the other; for they lay open the state of the christian church as now existing in the world, in a manner which concerns the christian in no slight degree well to consider and understand. To give you any adequate idea of that to which I allude, would be in the power of but few, for it would be to compress into a few lines, the substance of many volumes. I can only therefore bear testimony to the fact, and for farther elucidation must refer you to the works themselves. Meanwhile I proceed to remove some misconceptions which have proved a fertile source of prejudice to many.

Most people think that we believe Swedenborg to have written from an inspiration similar in kind and degree to that of the Prophets and Evangelists.

This is a mistake. We do not conceive that his writings form, (as in such case they would do) any part, continuation of, or addition to, the Word of God as already given to mankind; but believe that the Holy Scriptures stand separate in their sanctity from all other books; a work purely divine, the source of all true doctrine, and the appointed medium between God and man.

Our doctrines are misconceived also on another point by those who say, that we destroy the literal sense of the Word by substituting vague allegory for the plain and obvious meaning of Scripture, as you will perceive when I assert, that there is not a single event, word, or action, recorded in the four Gospels which we do not believe to have taken place as actually and really, as that I am now holding my pen; and in like manner do we believe in the events of the Old Testament relating to the Jews and the miracles which God wrought among them, all which, from the call of Abraham to the latest event recorded concerning them, we believe to have occurred in the same real and actual manner.

The doctrine which has led to this misconception is this, That we believe with the Apostle Paul and with the Fathers who wrote in the best time of the christian church, that besides and in addition to the literal sense of Scripture, there is another sense, for the edification of the regenerate and spiritual man, and which we therefore call a spiritual sense. To say that any person believing in the existence of such a sense, must necessarily deny the sense of the letter, would be like saying that because I believe you to have a soul, besides and in addition to your body, therefore I deny that you have a body at all, or that God made it likewise. So far from denying the literal sense of Scripture, I am bold in asserting that we hold the Scriptures to be divine and inspired in this sense more strictly than most other christians; for I find an opinion widely spread, that although God inspired the writers of the Bible in such a manner as to prevent any fundamental errors, yet were they left to themselves as to the choice of expressions in which its truths should be conveyed, and thus an alloy of the merely human understanding is allowed to mix itself with the divine Word. All such notions we reject; believing every word and its arrangement to have been, (in the original language) the work of God. I conclude

these remarks also by observing that we do not make the understanding of this inner sense of Scripture a necessary condition of man's salvation. Religion is believed among us to be much more an affair of the heart than the head; and although we believe the spiritual sense of the Scriptures, relating as it does to the various conditions of man's soul in the process of regeneration, to be of a value inestimable towards his purification; though we believe that the perception of the existence of such a sense, running through Scriptures (written centuries apart) like a soul, affords the sublimest proof of the divinity of the books in which it exists,—yet we also believe that a man may know nothing of all this, may understand even the letter very imperfectly, and still if he be desirous to apply what he does understand to the purification of his motives and actions, from obedience to the will of God, though, like the woman mentioned in the Gospel, he touch only the hem of Christ's garment, yet doing so in equal sincerity he shall, without doubt, like her, be made whole. I am desirous of removing these misconceptions, because I feel satisfied that a good share of the ill will which is directed against our doctrines, arises from mistakes concerning their true nature; and with the same view therefore, I shall endeavor to give you as clear a conception as I can of our opinions concerning the mission of Swedenborg and the benefits which mankind are intended (as we believe) to derive from it.

That the Scriptures are the great instrument of man's salvation no christian will deny; neither, if he receive their testimony, can he deny that God, before the clear sight of whose perfect providence the very hairs of our heads are numbered, overrules and directs all that can occur either in heaven or the earth. Now when we consider the love which gave the Scriptures, and the advantage man was intended to derive from them, even the saving of his soul, to which all else that can happen to him is a trifle, may we or can we think, that this great agent of God's mercy, the instruction of which his spirit is ever going forth to second and assist, is not under the most especial care of his providence; or can we think that the sequence of natural events is suffered by him to flow on without due provision for the effectual working of its saving influences over the church and the human race?

I think it cannot be doubted, by all who think rationally, that the Word of God, and its reception amongst men, must be a thing above all others under the especial care of his providence. Now if this be the case, are we not bound to infer that if at any time there should arise in the world any serious impediment or obstruction to the effectual operation and influence of the Holy Word, so as to bring man's salvation into peril, by its placing a barrier between his soul and this appointed channel of divine communications, are we not bound to believe that God would, in his mercy and wisdom, deal with this obstacle or impediment, and by some interposition of his providence either remove or so modify it, as to prevent its rendering the great end of his benevolence, the salvation of man by means of the Scriptures, frustrate and abortive? I think that it cannot be doubted.

That such impediments may arise, is easily conceivable indeed—that such have arisen is a matter of history. When, for instance, the Roman catholic church, the great church of Europe, cut off from her vast flock all direct communication with the Scriptures, suffering it to taste only as much of this healing fountain, as could ooze through the mass of her corrupt doctrines, stuffed as these were with such poisonous things as pardons and indulgences to sin for money, idle legends of saints and the worship of the rotten relics of dead men,—what protestant can doubt, that the convulsion which followed, and which we call the reformation, was God's dealing with such a state of things; a means of his providence whereby the Scriptures should again hold their proper place and functions in the church, a means by which they have by various protestant sects been since distributed over the entire face of the known world. When events like these occur, breaking up existing abuses and making beneficial changes in the form of human society, we cannot suppose they imply any kindling up of the divine ardor in man's behalf, greater than at all other times; the love of God must ever be one eternal thing; and such things doubtless come into operation, when for reasons lying open to the divine omniscience, though hidden from man, they are seen to be necessary, and when they could not be longer delayed without peril to the eternal interests of the human race. Our creed, which I cannot think you will deem unreasonable, is this :

That the aids of God for the salvation of man are perpetual ; that he acts in them from his love as a motive and through his wisdom as a means, whence they are ever a series of the most wonderful adaptations, to the case of individuals, to the church at large, and also to the characteristic peculiarities of the age in which they are intended to come into operation.

The view I have here taken is supported, as I humbly conceive, by all that we know, either of the attributes or the revealed purposes of God, and it leads us legitimately to this conclusion ; —

That just so far, and in such proportion as it can be made apparent, that there exists at any time such an obstacle or impediment, as we have been considering to the influence of the Holy Scriptures ; then just so far and in such proportion, have we a ground for the reasonable belief, that some interposition of God's providence will take place for its removal.

I must now say a word or two upon the question — Does any such impediment to the influence of the Scriptures exist at the present day ?

I am sincerely of opinion that there does ; the signs of its existence strike even the most superficial ; and I believe that the deeper and more penetrating the intellect of the man who shall set himself to the task of investigating it, so much the firmer will be his conviction, not only that there exists an impediment in its nature great and serious, but greater and more serious than any which has existed from the first giving of the Scriptures to the present day ; for what is the leading character of the present age ? Are not the men of it breaking forth as it were into one great chorus in the praise of their own wisdom, the words of which are, march of intellect, scientific discovery, extension of knowledge, with now and then a note of defiance about superstition, ancient formalities, trammels of thought, right of free inquiry into all things, and so on. You will perhaps say that much of this might, in their own philosophical way, be classed under the genus humbug, which in our day numbers so many species and varieties ; I know it. Still the change of mind, which makes this sort of humbug so infectious, is a real thing, and this is what I would indicate. Besides, no rational man can, I think, deny, that science has made her discoveries of no mean import, and likely to lead to many more.

Now is it not observable, exceptions apart, and speaking of men broadly and in classes, that religious men have least science, and scientific men least religion; and if things hold on their present course, which is probable, will not the scientific be the increasing class, the religious the decreasing one; and if so, will not ugly and profane opinions, which even now peep forth occasionally, come out with more boldness, and thus the number of those be augmented who look upon the Scriptures as some curious ancient document, in which ignorant and designing men ventured to assume the voice of deity, but of which modern science is at a hundred vulnerable points able to detect the forgery. It seems difficult to conceive but that the authority of the church, and the salutary influence of the Word of God, must be lessened by such a state of things; and how are they to resume their Power? Excellent men at Oxford, in England, have, I am told, a plan for this; and I learn that it consists in remodeling even the smallest ceremonial of the church so that she shall appear exactly the same as she did a thousand years ago. But can we remodel also the mind of the age? Can we blot out the discoveries of science, shut her book and bid her come and sit at the feet of the church in the humility of more simple times, there to learn that the stars shall fall to the earth, which she knows to be smaller than they; or can we bid her giant steam, after all his vapoing about the world, to shrink back and resume his two ancient and homely residences, the tea-kettle and the saucepan? And if we cannot do this, why it does seem to me that something better must be provided to meet the growing difficulties of the times; for much as we see, I cannot imagine that we yet see the full proportions of that state of things to which all seems tending; and it is utterly vain, in my opinion, to look to human aid to arrest the progress of all this; for what can the church or religious men do? Let them tell the geologist that his system is false, because contradicted by the Book of Genesis, and he will probably remind them of the case of Galileo Galilei, the astronomer, whose system was opposed and himself persecuted for the same reason, that it was contrary to the text of Scripture, and will finish, perhaps, by asking with a sneer, Why, as these texts still remain in the Bible, religious men have *left off trying* to overturn the Newtonian system by their authority.

There is, then, an influence pervading all modern thought, education and writings, arising from the progress, both real and imaginary, of science and the trust in man's own wisdom by such means engendered, which is producing an altered state of feeling and abated reverence for the Sacred Scriptures, and thus forming an impediment to man's salvation of the nature and kind I had previously indicated.

I must now — as I cannot otherwise elucidate the view I wish to present — give an opinion on the apparent riddle, that man's progress in knowledge should thus seem to contradict the Scriptures.

Religious truth, as contained in the Bible, must ever remain one unchangeable thing. But this does not prevent the opinions of men respecting this truth from varying; they may vary and have varied, from the first councils of the Christian church down to the various sects of the present day; such varieties being determined by the degree of enlightenment or strength of the faculties of judging, with which men set about the task of interpreting the Scriptures in any given age or time. Fixing, however, our attention solely to the Scriptures, and considering them separately from all human modes of interpretation and opinions, whether correct or incorrect, which have been formed respecting them, we are bound to believe that, as a revelation from God, they must in themselves contain the *truth*. It is evident, therefore, that no accession of knowledge by the progress of science or otherwise, can ever enable men to detect in them any thing of the nature of error or mistake; for, to speak of detecting error in the truth, is a contradiction in terms. If such things as apparent mistakes and contradictions to well known and established facts do nevertheless appear in the Scriptures, when viewed according to the prevalent modes of interpretation, where, I ask, can such things have their proper abiding place? We see that to suppose them to exist in the truth itself is an absurdity. Must they not, then, exist in the modes of interpretation and opinions through which the truth is viewed? Though science, therefore, can never prove the Scriptures themselves to be false, it may prove a previous mode of understanding them to be incorrect, or at least so far incorrect as the errors and mistakes alluded to are concerned. There has been a position often laid down in argument, which all

parties seem to consider as incontrovertible; it is this: that if the Scriptures be the Word of God, then can they contain nothing really at variance with a true knowledge of his works. And yet, if this be so, then there must be a prodigious amount of misconception somewhere! The religious man says it is on the side of science, which is ever putting forth vain theories in opposition to religious truth. That science has its mistakes as well as discoveries, no reasonable man will doubt; but by what rule of fair reasoning are we compelled to conclude that all the mistake must ever be on the side of science? Is the investigation of spiritual truth so much easier than that of natural truth, that the human mind, asserted to be thus fallible on the side of science, can make no mistake on the side of religion? I need appeal only to the opposite creeds of the multitude of sects, all drawn from the same Word of God, to shew that the mind of man is as fallible on the one subject as on the other, and add thereto the assertion that false interpretations of Scripture would be just as much at variance with truth in science as false interpretations of nature would be with truth in religion.

But, whatever be the amount of error on either side, certain it is that a state of things has been produced which is sufficiently bewildering. The bulk of the religious world fear to touch these entangled subjects, taking their creeds as it were by the lot of inheritance, receiving by education the notions which prevail where they may happen to be located, leaving it to the great consummation of all things to prove whether they hold falsehood or truth, while those whom love of truth or fear of error forces into independent thought, search in vain for a footing of certainty.

Now it is a part of that madness for which the world gives us credit, to believe, that at such a juncture some interposition of God's providence in aid of true religion and of those who seek it, might be expected; to believe that it has taken place, that a sanctuary has been provided for the sincere of this and after ages, in which they may find shelter from present and coming dangers, and from which they may draw that guiding clue of truth which shall lead them through these labyrinths, and enable them to untie all the many-folded knots of scientific and sectarian controversy in which the most vital questions of

Christianity lie at this day perplexed and involved. We believe, that as the instrument of imparting these benefits to mankind, a certain human mind, of great activity, method, clearness and capacity, has been selected, and by providence led (as a preliminary step,) through the circle of human science. But we believe it to have been more especially intended, that the truth thus to be imparted should embrace spiritual rather than natural subjects — should be able to meet the desolating arguments of those who believe only the bodily senses, and, by the unfolding of its deep positions, shew the self-esteemed profundities of the metaphysical skeptic to be but shallow thinking; that it should be able to afford plain and positive instruction concerning a future state and the nature of man's responsibility and existence in it, not as a mere metaphysical abstraction of certain qualities of mind, but as a real man; and in fact to strengthen and support all those good and holy opinions which in this age are ready to die. Now it will readily be perceived, that truth of this order and with these capabilities, could be elicited by no human mind in the ordinary position of humanity, bound and limited by its five senses to this natural world; for all that the most highly endowed mind could do on such subjects would be to guess and theorize as others had done before. And therefore we believe that He who never does his work by halves, has graciously provided that the mind, chosen by him as the means of imparting this instruction, should be placed in a new and unusual position, by which conjecture might give place to the certainty of experience. The difference of position we believe to have been this; that the faculties of the soul, by means of which it has perception in its own world, and which are closed in ordinary minds during the life of the body, were in this mind *open*, a means by which the realities of that world can, when God so pleases, be brought as actually under the mind's cognisance by such spiritual faculties, as the things of the natural world usually are by the faculties of the body.

To this brief and necessarily very imperfect sketch of our view of Swedenborg's mind and state as an instrument, I will, for the sake of clearness, add a short summary of our belief respecting the uses to be performed by it and their necessity, which may gather what I wish to convey into one focus.

We believe, that a great change has come over the human mind in modern times, which is still proceeding in an increasing ratio, from its progress in natural and scientific knowledge. That it has not progressed in like manner in spiritual and divine knowledge; and that consequently men are now in a high degree of natural knowledge and in a low degree of spiritual knowledge. That, therefore, the power of worldly things over the human mind has greatly increased; and the power of spiritual things greatly decreased. That the mind of man is thus in an inverted position, because worldly things, which should be subordinate, are preëminent, and spiritual things, which should be preëminent, are subordinate. That man's belief in the Scriptures has been shaken, because many things *supposed* to be taught in them have been proved by science to be untrue, whereby the things of religion, which ought to be matters of faith, have become matters of doubt. That the Sacred Scriptures are nevertheless divine, and therefore contain instruction for the human mind which is adapted for every state that it can possibly acquire. That God will, by their means, restore again the mind of man to its true position and to order. That this will be effected, not by the destruction of the natural knowledge which he has acquired, but by the unfolding of a higher degree of wisdom and spiritual instruction from the Scriptures than any to which he has yet attained, which wisdom will govern and at the same time be in harmony with his natural knowledge. That the portal of access has been graciously opened by the Lord to this divine wisdom in his Word through the instrumentality of a human being properly endowed to instruct the church in the principles upon which the Scriptures must be studied for its attainment. That mankind, nevertheless, will for a time treat these views of the Holy Scriptures with contempt, because the spirit of the present age closes the faculties of the human mind to spiritual knowledge. That still, some will see their value and receive them, and that the number of these will gradually increase, so as to form a Church, which Church will in time become the noblest that has yet existed on the earth. That the existence of this church is predicted in the Revelations of St. John, and is there called the bride the Lamb's wife, and the holy city New Jerusalem, (which terms are known

to relate to the church,) and that it will exist on earth, because it was seen to come *down* from God *out* of Heaven.

I am fully aware, that, unaided by argument or illustration, the above statement must necessarily seem strange; yet, taking it as it is, I think we may say this for it, that, *if true*, it must be acknowledged to contain things, whose high importance to the Christian of the present day nothing can possibly exceed; and it is therefore our plea for the examination of the doctrines of which it is the result, that if they are thus seen to involve things which, if true would be of so high an importance to mankind, they are surely well worth the trouble requisite to ascertain whether they are true or not.

The belief in the infidel tendencies of modern science is however by no means peculiar to us; the petitions against the late government scheme in England, for the education of the people, proceeded, I have no doubt, from the prevalence of this sentiment in the religious world. The Church well knows that science and the march-of-intellect party are not her friends. And yet I appeal to every candid man to say if it is not a lamentable state of things when man's progress in any kind of knowledge is felt to be injurious to his religious belief? There must be a true view of things which will bind man's knowledge, be it much or little, into a general harmony; and is it not the highest possible presumptive evidence of the truth of any system when it is found capable of doing this? Yet such a power is the main pillar of our belief in the doctrines of Swedenborg. Wonderful, indeed, is the mistake of the world in general as to the tenure of our faith. It thinks, forsooth, that because a certain man chose to assert, in sundry books, that he had received a command from heaven to write certain things, that therefore and for no better reason, we also choose to believe him. Far different indeed is the case. It is because his works possess a light and power which we find in no other merely human author; because he is able to make the rough places plain and to lay the mountainous difficulties of religious questions low, that we believe him to be indeed a true messenger preparing the way of the Lord.

The announcement, in these writings, that their author holds such a position is, however, the great stumbling-block which the world cannot get over. Had he chosen to put

forth his works as the guessings of his own mind, I have not the shadow of a doubt that multitudes would have been loud in the praise of the very same things which they now call madness. Such a mode of management, or any thing like management at all, in the manœuvring sense of the term, was perfectly incompatible with the simple integrity of the man. A strict examination of his life leaves us no ground for supposing that he ever wished to place himself at the head of a sect, or make his opinions the stepping-stone to views of ambition or worldly advantage. It must have been evident to him that, in publishing such works, he was giving his reputation as a natural philosopher, (which was considerable in his own time) the most demolishing blow it could receive. Yet never does he appear trying to soften this by turning the more winning side of a position first to the reader's inspection; but, on the contrary, startles him frequently by statements, the reasonableness of which can only be seen from a deep understanding of the system of which they form a part. Even the bursts of eloquence, which adorn his philosophical works, are all discarded in those upon theology, and he confines himself to the most rigid simplicity of style; in fact, he writes like a man fulfilling a set task, and sinking all considerations of self in its due accomplishment. He well knew, however, how his works would affect the generality of mankind. He says, "I am aware that many will think that I have written these things from a disordered imagination; but those who more deeply consider them will perceive that I could not have invented them." And so exactly it has fallen out; the world, which ever rests in first impressions, has readily adopted the former of these opinions, and it is equally true that we, who have more deeply considered them, have been led to adopt the latter. We have seen too much of the depth of their foundation in the truth of God's Word and of all created existence, to believe that they could have been the offspring of any unaided human intellect, much less of one in an unsound state; and it is hence that the supposition of Divine agency becomes, with us, not only credible but necessary, as a reasonable mode of accounting for their production.

And now in conclusion let me ask — Can any man, from his own private knowledge of the counsel of God, take upon himself to say, either that God could not or would

not adopt such a mode of enlightening mankind as this which we have been considering? And if it be instantly evident that no man can say any such thing, then ought the announcement that God has done this, to be deemed sufficient to close the eyes and ears of all Christians against the contents of the books in which such announcement is made, and their minds to every rational argument with which it may be accompanied? I know how strangely such a thing sounds to men, full of the every-day matters of the world; and I know the feeling which instantly arises in their minds to dismiss it as a piece of fanatical absurdity; but I know also that, under the same feeling, they would deal, in a way precisely similar, with the announcement of any of the interpositions of God recorded in Holy Writ, supposing them about to happen now. Imagine to yourself that the incarnation, instead of being a past were a coming event, and that some man were to publish the assertion in a book, that the God of the universe would be born a child in the family of some poor carpenter, how many votes do you think he would get, from the men of this gas and steam age, for the probability of such an occurrence? In fact these more direct interpositions of God are events between the occurrence of which so many ages usually intervene that the worldly experiences of our short lives (though they may supply us with abundance of prejudice) can afford us no safe data from which to reason at all concerning them. If this question be met at all it must be met on higher ground. The attributes of God, the present condition of man, the true meaning of Scripture prophecy, and the internal evidence of these writings, — such are its legitimate sources of argument. To opposition, drawn from thence, (though it would be to us a great novelty) we should listen, I beg you to believe, with the deference it would deserve. But while we humbly confide in the opinion that the sources of which I speak all teem with arguments in favor of our opinions, it may not be surprising that the mere *pshaw nonsense* of the world should not very greatly affect our convictions.

In quitting the subject, there is one thing I would wish to leave clearly understood, namely, that the truth or falsehood of Swedenborg's writings and mission is not the question which I have attempted to argue in these pages. The position I have from the first taken, and which I have

attempted to illustrate and defend, is simply this ; — that for any thing the world as yet knows or has fairly proved to the contrary, these doctrines *may be* just as true as we suppose them. Because, the opinion of their untruth, which prevails so generally, is accompanied by an ignorance of their true nature, and consequent incompetence to decide, as general as itself. I have endeavored to interest you by the assurance, that beyond the thick veil which the apathy and misconception of mankind have spread before these doctrines, there lie things, the true shape and import of which the world has never yet seen, but which, illustrating and illustrated by the wonderful changes now going on around us, altogether form a case worthy the deepest investigation of every rational and religious man. I have sought to induce you to pierce this veil, to see these things as they really are, and then judge for yourself. It may be possible that in this I shall fail ; the feeling, however, of duty, from which I have made the attempt, prompts me to add, finally, a consideration to which I am aware you of all men will not be insensible.

These doctrines come to us in the name and on the alleged authority of God. Now whatever security or confidence Christians may feel, that the contempt with which they treat them does not fall back on any such Divine authority ; yet apart from the mere feeling of confidence, is not this security mainly based on the following supposition ; — that the man who put forth these doctrines to the world, was either mad, self-deluded, or an intentional deceiver ?

Without, then, attempting to shew that this supposition is groundless, may I not truly observe respecting it, that those who rest upon its truth as a security that they are not disrespectfully rejecting the proffered mercies of God, make it a security for a very serious thing ; a due and reverent sense of which one should think might indicate the duty of an examination into the foundation upon which the supposition itself rests. Is it respectful to the name in which these things have come, to allow it to rest (as most do) upon that worst of all foundations in religious matters, the opinion, rumor, and hearsay evidence of the world ? I will not hide from you my own conviction, that from the aspect these doctrines present to those best acquainted with them, from the blameless life and character

of their immediate author, and more especially from the authority which he has claimed for them, I think it the duty of all Christians, once, at least, in their lives, to give them a serious investigation.

The man who rises from such a task with a conviction of their fallacy will then do so with a clear conscience, or at least in such proportion as he performed his task in a candid and truth-seeking spirit. That where religious truth is concerned a man ought well to know what that is which he receives, is an admonition of most grave and vital importance; but surely all the reasons which make it so, make it equally important that a man should know as well, what that is which he *rejects*.

I am, my dear sir, &c. &c.

